



Utah Parks and Recreation - Voices for Utah Children - Utah Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics  
Get Healthy Utah – Utah Association of Local Boards of Health and Local Health Departments

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## HB 208: Utah Safe Routes to School Program

*Ensuring **how** you get to school does not determine **if** you get to school*

### What is Safe Routes to School?

Safe Routes to School is a Utah-run program through the Department of Transportation. Their goal is to improve the safety of students walking to and from school. Safe Routes to School projects improve sidewalks, create crosswalks, educate children in pedestrian safety, and provide signage that helps to keep kids and drivers safe.

### Why is this program necessary?

State law<sup>1</sup> precludes bus service for all able-bodied children living within 1.5 miles of an elementary school. However, state law is silent on how those children are supposed to safely get to and from school. Over the past several years, an average of five children have been killed and another three have been injured as they walked to and from school in Utah. Communities that have received Safe Routes to School dollars have seen a reduction in injury rates. In fact, Safe Routes to School programs have been shown to decrease injuries to kids by 33 percent and for people of all ages by 44 percent.

### How are Safe Routes to School funded?

State Transportation funds have been used the past several years. Before that Federal Transportation funds were used. When Congress revamped the Federal Transportation funding package funds for this program were cut. The state, seeing the great value and demand for safe routes to school, continued to run the program with their own funds. Cities, working with the schools in their boundaries, identify areas that have proven to be unsafe for children. Working with schools they submit an application for project funds and send it to the state Department of Transportation. A committee reviews applications with traffic studies and makes a determination of those applications that are most meritorious.

### What cities and schools are receiving funds? Are these only going to Urban areas?

In 2018 the State Department of Transportation received nearly sixty applications from across the state.

- 31 of the 59 applications were from Rural areas. Approximately 52.5% of the total applications.
- 28 of the 59 applications were from Urban areas. Approximately 47.5% of the total applications.

Of those applications that were approved, 18 of the 28 were Rural and 10 of the 28 were Urban.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://le.utah.gov/xcode/Title53F/Chapter2/53F-2-S403.html>

## Why aren't all applications funded?

The Department of Transportation sets aside approximately \$1.3M each year for Safe Routes to School infrastructure and education projects. Unfortunately, a lack of resources has led to 50 – 67% of applications being denied each year, needlessly putting our children at risk. Every child deserves the ability to get to school safely.

## What can be done to help these students trying to get to school in unsafe areas?

Increase the amount of state funds going toward this important child safety program. This past week the State Board of Education presented their priorities for the year. “Safe and Healthy Schools” was the third priority listed. Safe Routes to School aligns with the State Board of Education’s stated goals.

## Does Safe Routes to School work?

Absolutely! Alpine Elementary<sup>2</sup> (Alpine City) was awarded the 2010 Oberstar Award, a national honor that recognizes outstanding achievement among the more than 10,000 Safe Routes to School programs across the U.S. With bike trails, sidewalks, solar-powered speed limit signs, safety poster contests, walking school buses, and bike trains as elements of their Safe Routes to School program, they increased the number of children who regularly walk and bicycle to school from 35 to 50 percent between September 2008 and May 2010.

Active kids are better learners. When kids are active before school they arrive alert and ready to learn. Students who are physically active on a regular basis have better attendance, behave better in class, and have higher test scores. Studies have shown that kids who can safely walk and bike to their neighborhood school get regular physical activity, do better in school<sup>3</sup>, and experience improved mental health.<sup>4</sup>

Safe Routes to School programs provide children with an opportunity to develop independence and self-reliance, values we pride ourselves on as Utahns. We can teach our children how to cross the road safely but telling them to do it in an unsafe situation will only put them in harm’s way. Sidewalks, crosswalks, and safe intersections are essential.

## Does this really need to be a priority?

Utah is fortunate that our state leaders have put an increasing emphasis on active transportation in recent years. The governor, in his recent budget proposal, asked that the legislature help give the DOT more flexibility in funding active transportation projects by allocating appropriations that would “enhance active transportation networks”, “improve residents’ access to opportunities”, and “prioritize solutions that connect people to the places that matter to them – regardless of transportation mode”.<sup>5</sup>

While safe sidewalks might not have been an issue years ago the number of vehicles on our roads has grown by more than 50 Million in just the past 20 years.<sup>6</sup> Our kids are getting less exercise than any previous generation.<sup>7</sup> This is a major factor contributing to one in three kids in the U.S. being overweight or obese, conditions that lead to heart disease, diabetes, hypertension—and eventually early death.

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<sup>2</sup> [https://www.heraldextra.com/news/local/north/alpine/alpine-elementary-receives-national-walk-to-school-award/article\\_91d46f8a-703a-5d84-866f-0c4f1b1d8fdd.html](https://www.heraldextra.com/news/local/north/alpine/alpine-elementary-receives-national-walk-to-school-award/article_91d46f8a-703a-5d84-866f-0c4f1b1d8fdd.html)

<sup>3</sup> Singh A, Uijtendewilligen L, Twisk JW, van Mechelen W, Chinapaw MJ. Physical activity and performance at school: a systematic review of the literature including a methodological quality assessment. *Arch Pediatr Adolesc Med.* 2012;166(1):49–55.

<sup>4</sup> Biddle SJ, Asare M. Physical activity and mental health in children and adolescents: a review of reviews. *Br J Sports Med.* 2011;45(11):886–895.

<sup>5</sup> <https://gomb.utah.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Budget-Book-FINAL-12.18.18.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/ohim/onh/onh98.pdf> (211.6 M in 1998, 263.6 M in 2015)

<sup>7</sup> McDonald NC, Brown AL, Marchetti LM, Pedroso MS. U.S. school travel, 2009: an assessment of trends. *Am J Prev Med.* 2011; 41:146–151.